THE VELOCITY OF AUTUMN

BY ERIC COBLE

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INC.

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THE VELOCITY OF AUTUMN premiered at Boise Contemporary Theater *(Matthew Cameron Clark, Artistic Director; Helen Peterson, Managing Director)* on April 9, 2011. It was directed by Michael Perlman, featuring Mary Portser as Alexandra and Matthew Cameron Clark as Chris.

THE VELOCITY OF AUTUMN was originally produced on Broadway by Larry Kaye & HOP Theatricals, Van Dean & The Broadway Consortium, Joan Raffe & Jhecc Tolentino, Catherine & Fred Adler, Michael J. Moritz Jr., and KIRN Productions, at the Booth Theatre, opening on April 21, 2014. It was directed by Molly Smith; the set design was by Eugene Lee; the costume design was by Linda Cho; the lighting design was by Rui Rica; and the sound design was by Darron L West. The cast was as follows:

ALEXANDRA..... Estelle Parsons
CHRIS .....Stephen Spinella

CHARACTERS

ALEXANDRA

CHRIS

SETTING

The second-floor living room of Alexandra's brownstone home in Brooklyn, New York. The room is filled *(but not cluttered)* with books, LPs, decade's worth of knickknacks, some small sculptures, and several noticeably empty patches of wall where paintings have clearly hung and are now missing. The place hasn't been kept up, but it's not frightening. A doorway leads off to the kitchen/dining room.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the room is that the front door is sealed with duct tape and blocked by a barricade of a comfy chair, end- table, and several Mason jars of filmy liquid, all tied together with a makeshift string of rags and newspapers. Similar jars and cloths sit on the sills of the two large windows that look out at the lovely fall morning. The windows are both closed, and outside one of them we can see the final leaves on several branches of a large tree.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Though both Alexandra and Chris have spent many years in Brooklyn, they are not natives, and what dialect they have, if any, is mid-western.

THE VELOCITY OF AUTUMN

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Lights up on a woman, 80, wearing a nice outfit and jewelry as if she's going out soon. In her hands, however, is another Mason jar of liquid and a lighter. Beside her is a small frying pan. This is Alexandra. She slumps in another comfy chair in the middle of the room. It's unclear if she's sleeping or dead. The jar and lighter are about to slip from her hands . . . A CD player on a stand by the door plays the final phrases of Berlioz's Requiem, coming to a grand conclusion, wild applause. Alexandra doesn't move. Silence.

Then a noise from outside one of the windows. A rustling. Alexandra doesn't move. We see a figure in the window. A man is climbing to the window from the tree outside. He struggles, reaching for the window, trying quietly to open it. Alexandra doesn't move. The man gets it open and starts to pull himself inside. We now see he's in his 40s, wearing a worn denim jacket over a t- shirt, faded black jeans, and cowboy boots. His hair is in a ponytail and he's out of shape - definitely not designed to break into upper -floor windows. This is Chris. He's halfway through when he bangs his knee - winces . . .

ALEXANDRA: *(Opens her eyes.)* . . . Who's here? *(Chris freezes ...Alexandra looks around, sees him at the window . . . Screams. Beat.)*

CHRIS: Hey, Mom.
ALEXANDRA: ...Chris? What the hell are you doing out there?
CHRIS: I came to see you.
ALEXANDRA: No. No... no... no... *(She starts trying to stand.)*
CHRIS: Mom, just let me
ALEXANDRA: You're not here, you are not here *(She tries to get out of her chair- it's a battle -He's trying to get in the window - it's a battle.)*
CHRIS: Would you *(Slips, catches himself)* Dammit!
ALEXANDRA: This stupid chair
CHRIS: Look, I'm just trying to
ALEXANDRA: I said leave me alone and I meant leave me alone!
CHRIS: I'm not — Mom, I can't hang on
ALEXANDRA: Good! *(She's almost up.)*
CHRIS: Mom
ALEXANDRA: Oh, these blasted knees *(She moves for the window.)*
CHRIS: I'm two stories up! Let me in or I'm gonna die
ALEXANDRA: Should have thought of that before you tried to break into an old lady's house.
CHRIS: I'm serious! I'm slipping! Mom! *(She hesitates, not looking at him ...He's clawing to hang on ...)* Can you... could I get a hand...
ALEXANDRA: No. *(She steps away, her back to him.)*
CHRIS: Godammit, Mom!
ALEXANDRA: There's no need to take the Lord's name in vain. He didn't put you out there. *(Chris continues to struggle in.)* You better not have hurt my tree!
CHRIS: I didn't... hurt your tree...
ALEXANDRA: Clambering around out there like some third-rate Johnny Weissmuller - *(And he's in, thumping to the floor in a heap, panting ...)*
CHRIS: ... I just... wanted to come see you...
ALEXANDRA: *(Not looking at him.)* Well, you've seen me. Now go back the way you came in.
CHRIS: Mom!
ALEXANDRA: I'm serious. You want to play monkey up, you play monkey down. But so help me, you break one twig on that tree, and I'll blow this whole house to kingdom come.
CHRIS: And *that* wouldn't hurt the tree.
ALEXANDRA: I'm a dangerous woman. As I'm sure you've heard.

CHRIS: I thought they were exaggerating. You know how Michael
ALEXANDRA: I do. He wasn't. Not this time. *(She turns and looks at him. Pause. They fully take each other in for the first time ...)* You got old. *(He watches her ...She really stares at him ...)* My God. You turned into a man. A skinny old raggedy man.
CHRIS: Do you know why I'm here?
ALEXANDRA: Your voice sounds right. Everything else
CHRIS: Mom
ALEXANDRA: You should have sent a, a picture. You could've prepared me
CHRIS: Kind of short notice.
ALEXANDRA: Did they send you?
CHRIS: Nobody
ALEXANDRA: 'Cause it's clever, I'll give them that, very crafty.
CHRIS: Mom, nobody is
ALEXANDRA: I'd applaud the sheer cruelty of it, but my hands are full.
CHRIS: Where'd you get the gasoline?
ALEXANDRA: Don't come near me.
CHRIS: I'm just asking you
ALEXANDRA: It's not gasoline.
CHRIS: Kerosene, then, lamp oil, whatever.
ALEXANDRA: It's developing fluid.
CHRIS: What?
ALEXANDRA: Film-developing fluid. For photography. *(Chris laughs.)* Laugh it up. It's more combustible than gasoline.
CHRIS: I'm just thinking where — Who even *has* film-developing fluid anymore?
ALEXANDRA: Me.
CHRIS: Of course.
ALEXANDRA: It was your fathers. It's mine now. He had three gallons of the stuff saved up.
CHRIS: And it's just been sitting here all this time?
ALEXANDRA: It was a gift from the Lord, remembering that fluid.
CHRIS: I'm not sure that was God talking to
ALEXANDRA: Night before last, two nights ago, two in the morning, I'm in every corner, every drawer, looking for any defense I can find
CHRIS: Jesus, Mom.
ALEXANDRA: Don't you "Jesus, Mom" me; I need to hold off an

army! I have that kitchen knife set your Aunt Kathryn gave me, right? I have one solid frying pan. But all of that's hand-to-hand, I can't move worth a damn anymore. I needed a distance weapon. Something to keep Michael and Jennifer at bay. For the first time in my life, I wished I'd kept your grandfather's shotgun.
CHRIS: Mom!
ALEXANDRA: But your Uncle Sebastian wanted it and what was I going to shoot in Brooklyn?
CHRIS: Exactly!
ALEXANDRA: Well, now I know what I want to shoot in Brooklyn! The Mongol Hordes! Invaders!
CHRIS: We're not
ALEXANDRA: And then God told me! Jennifer's room! Or what was Jennifer's room. Before your father went crazy with the cameras and needed his "darkroom." Retirement did not agree with that man. Your brother told me, after Dad died, that we needed to get rid of all that stuff. Thank God I wouldn't let him. I'd be defenseless now.
CHRIS: You don't need defenses.
ALEXANDRA: A man just broke into my house two minutes ago!
CHRIS: Because you won't answer the front door!
ALEXANDRA: Because if I do, there's an army of police outside to tackle me and haul me off in a straightjacket!
CHRIS: Because you're threatening to blow up an entire building!
ALEXANDRA: Because they won't leave me alone!
CHRIS: Because you're crazy! You don't blow up a Park Slope brownstone!
ALEXANDRA: So it's the real estate you're worried about.
CHRIS: Yes! Partly! You could sell this place and have enough to live in an A-one nursing home for fifty years!
ALEXANDRA: You sound just like your brother.
CHRIS: I didn't come here to be insulted.
ALEXANDRA: Then why are you here? *(His phone rings. He hesitates ...It rings again, he clicks it off without looking.)* Who was that?
CHRIS: Okay, let's say you're not crazy, fine, but what you're doing? This? If you — look, Mom, look at this objectively, you've barricaded yourself, you're making threats
ALEXANDRA: They're the ones making threats.
CHRIS: Okay, it's not "they," it's "we," it's your family
ALEXANDRA: Since when did you rejoin the tribe?

CHRIS: The point is, in times of crisis a family comes back together
ALEXANDRA: Then start treating me like family. You do not sic the police on your own mother.
CHRIS: Nobody's
ALEXANDRA: Michael is! And Jennifer! They both said, you ask them, they both said if I didn't play their little game they'd have the police down on me so fast, it'd make your head spin! Happy Mother's Day!
CHRIS: I'm sure they didn't
ALEXANDRA: Are you calling me a liar?
CHRIS: No.
ALEXANDRA: You ask them yourself, you shimmy back down and tell them if they want to inherit this valuable little building, they all need to back off.
CHRIS: Can I go out the front door to tell them?
ALEXANDRA: Don't insult me.
CHRIS: I just want
ALEXANDRA: Who's on the other side of that door? Hah? Michael? Jennifer? How many police?
CHRIS: Nobody, there's nobody, they haven't called the cops. Not yet.
ALEXANDRA: The door stays closed. You leave by the window. *(Beat. Chris watches her.)* Which I will then lock.
CHRIS: It doesn't lock.
ALEXANDRA: I'll lock it, I'll tape it.
CHRIS: Right? Michael and Jen didn't remember that, but I did. I knew you'd get the window by the back steps, I knew you'd get all the doors, all the windows — except the one by the tree. *(She watches him.)* Because of the birds? Right? You need to hear the birds in the tree? You can't tell me you want to shut all that down and blow it all up
ALEXANDRA: I will.
CHRIS: I don't believe you.
ALEXANDRA: I'm a cornered animal, Christopher. I'll do whatever it takes.
CHRIS: You're gonna burn down the whole block. You do this, you're gonna kill innocent people
ALEXANDRA: Not if you get out and give them warning.
CHRIS: What about Mr. What's-his-name. On the first Boor. The renter downstairs.

ALEXANDRA: Mr. Lefkowitz.
CHRIS: Mr. Lefkowitz
ALEXANDRA: Lenowitz. Mr. Lenowitz lives downstairs. Mr. Lefkowitz was my piano teacher when I was a little girl. How'd you know that?
CHRIS: Mr. Lenowitz. The non-piano-teacher on the first floor. Are you going to blow him up too?
ALEXANDRA: He's on vacation for another two weeks. He's in Virginia seeing his kids. His kids are nice. They never threatened to jail him.
CHRIS: Are you sure he's not down there?
ALEXANDRA: He asked me to water his plants.
CHRIS: But now you're going to set fire to those same plants, to everything he
ALEXANDRA: Why did they send you?
CHRIS: Who?
ALEXANDRA: They. Them. The ones who want me out, after forty-five years here, who want to lock me up and shove tubes in me and chain me to a bed.
CHRIS: They didn't send me.
ALEXANDRA: Oh, you just showed up, out of the blue, decided to finally come home and climb a tree to see your dear old mother.
CHRIS: Climbing the tree was my idea.
ALEXANDRA: That I believe.
CHRIS: What's that supposed to mean?
ALEXANDRA: You're the cockamamie one. You were always the cockamamie one.
CHRIS: Thank you.
ALEXANDRA: The other kids set up a lemonade stand on the stoop, trying to raise a little money, ten cents a cup or something, and I look around and you're out there dressed like a kangaroo, hopping in traffic.
CHRIS: One time. That happened once. I was trying to make us seem exotic.
ALEXANDRA: And Halloween, that Halloween, Jennifer and Michael were pirates or a spaceman or something, and you went as a - the cloud thing - star thing, leaving glitter and black ink trailing behind you
CHRIS: Infinity. I wanted to be the embodiment of Infinity.
ALEXANDRA: No one would let you in their house.
CHRIS: — I'd read a book. You gave me that book!

ALEXANDRA: Cockamamie.
CHRIS: You helped me make it! You said I was creative.
ALEXANDRA: There's creative and there's screw-loose, and boy, you kept straddling that fence.
CHRIS: *(Overlapping.)* You went after Mike and Jen for being normal —
ALEXANDRA: I wondered if you were all there, sometimes. I did.
CHRIS: *(Overlapping.)* — you went after me for being creative.
ALEXANDRA: When you were a baby even, just getting you out of diapers was like the Bataan Death March.
CHRIS: So we're going with the Chris diaper story.
ALEXANDRA: I'd have thought, the third child, you'd see by example, want to imitate your older brother and sister
CHRIS: — Yes.
ALEXANDRA: - I would have thought the trouble would be with Michael, he had no role models, but BANG. He just made up his mind and did it. In one day. One afternoon
CHRIS: — I know
ALEXANDRA: - Jennifer pretty much the same way, but you, I swear, you must have loved sitting in a warm stew of your own feces and urine
CHRIS: — Thank you, Mother.
ALEXANDRA: You just would not learn.
CHRIS: This is great. This is really good. I came here to hear this.
ALEXANDRA: Nobody asked you to come. Or so you said.
CHRIS: Jennifer called me, okay? She called me because things were getting bad.
ALEXANDRA: *(Snorts.)* For her maybe.
CHRIS: She told me about the grocery store.
ALEXANDRA: What happened at the grocery store? *(Beat. Chris watches her.)*
CHRIS: And about your bridge game.
ALEXANDRA: That. That was -you think you know people. Twenty years. Christine and Lois had been playing for twenty years! Frankie for almost that long.
CHRIS: *(Overlapping.)* Those were some of your last friends in the world, Mom. You want allies in this, you can't
ALEXANDRA: They were cheating. At least one of them was. Lying. And I will not have lying in this house. You know that.
CHRIS: I know that.

ALEXANDRA: They want to cheat and lie; they can damn well do it with someone else.
CHRIS: Apparently, they all think you're mistaken.
ALEXANDRA: What else are they going to say? They're liars!
CHRIS: Did you throw something at them?
ALEXANDRA: ...they were cheating.
CHRIS: Apparently, they were pretty scared.
ALEXANDRA: Good.
CHRIS: A metal tray or something.
ALEXANDRA: What does this have to do with you?
CHRIS: The point is, you've been having increasing troubles —
ALEXANDRA: Jennifer has troubles. Michael has troubles
CHRIS: Their trouble is *you*, Mom. *(Pause. She looks at him ...)*
ALEXANDRA: Nice. Very nice. You think you can come in here you run away, you can't stand us, we're, what, we're beneath you, cramping you
CHRIS: I never
ALEXANDRA: Nothing! We hear nothing for twenty years, you can't even be bothered to come back for your own father's funeral, but now, now we've finally come up with a crisis worthy of the great Christopher, so you can finally swoop in here and do something your brother and sister can't! Finally, we'll see how great and truly, worthy you are! All hail, Mighty Christopher!
CHRIS: That's not
ALEXANDRA: *(Overlapping.)* Except I'm sorry to disappoint you, Hero, but we don't need your help. We don't need you! You had decades of chances
CHRIS: Mom
ALEXANDRA: Decades of chances, and it's too late, you're too late, we don't want you, we don't need you, you can just tuck your scrawny little tail between your feeble little legs and run like the chickenshit you are, like you always do. Run!
CHRIS: Gladly. *(He starts for the door, she blocks him.)*
ALEXANDRA: Through the window!
CHRIS: No!
ALEXANDRA: I will douse myself; I will set myself on fire
CHRIS: And I'll bring the marshmallows!
ALEXANDRA: You're a monster!
CHRIS: You want to know why I stay away; it's 'cause I know coming to this house is gonna be like visiting the witches in *Macbeth!* Here's

my own ghastly nightmare future staring back at me from your crazy eyes — "Behold what you will become, Christopher Benton, here is your old age and it is ugly as hell!"

ALEXANDRA: You

CHRIS: You're threatening to burn down our house, Mom! You've got a son and daughter outside wetting themselves over whether or not to warn the neighbors about their pyro mother! They gave me an hour, Mom — One Hour — before they call the cops, and then there is *no* going back. You are locked up or you are dead if that happens. That's tear gas, that's SWAT teams, that's snipers on the roof across the street to shoot you in the head!

ALEXANDRA: I'm sure Michael would love that kind of publicity!

CHRIS: That's all that's holding him back! *That's* why they called me! *That's* why I flew in here in the middle of the goddamn night because Michael and Jen knew you wouldn't talk to them and maybe, just maybe, I could somehow talk sense into your deranged thick headed skull and I — stupid, foolish, idiot me — said Yes! And so I failed, okay, I see that, I messed up, *again*, thank you, yes, I'm still that freaky little kid to be laughed at, but I will be damned if I am crawling back out that stupid window and not walking out the front door like a grown man! *(She stands blocking the front door, staring him down.)* I do not want to hurt you.

ALEXANDRA: *(Quietly.)* I think you do. I think you do very much. *(Pause ...They stare at one another ...His phone rings again. And again.)* That's them, isn't it? Checking up on little Chris? *(Chris silences his phone, walks back to the window.)* Don't pull the leash too hard, they'll lock you up - *(Pause. Chris stares out the window ...)* You see? You see how it feels?

CHRIS: *(Looking out the window.)* You know what happens to people on the inside of the castle during a siege?

ALEXANDRA: They're revered as heroes.

CHRIS: They starve.

ALEXANDRA: I have food.

CHRIS: Was that what the grocery store "mishap" was all about?

ALEXANDRA: I have plenty of food.

CHRIS: Maybe you were just trying to stock up the Alamo?

ALEXANDRA: I don't eat much. One of the many unpleasant surprises of my decaying body is that food doesn't have much taste anymore. It's all going gray in my mouth. I've gone a day without eating and not even noticed it.

CHRIS: Can I point out that might be one of their concerns?
ALEXANDRA: Why? I'm not their child. I'm not still growing. In fact, I'm shrinking. I'm physically getting smaller, have you noticed chat? *(He doesn't answer.)* I said, have you noticed chat? *(He says nothing. She nods, seeing it in his face. She turns away.)* "Dwindling." That's the word I settled on.
CHRIS: You're still gonna run out of food.
ALEXANDRA: Anthony's will deliver. They did chat for ...What's-his-name. Around the corner, when he couldn't walk.
CHRIS: And you don't think the NYPD will send in an undercover cop to slap cuffs on you just as you're paying for your ramen noodles?
ALEXANDRA: Anthony wouldn't do chat to me.
CHRIS: And if the city cuts off your water? Your electricity, the heat?
ALEXANDRA: Then I guess I'd die here.
CHRIS: Exactly.
ALEXANDRA: Which means I got my wish. *(She sits.)* Checkmate.
CHRIS: It's not a game.
ALEXANDRA: Isn't it?
CHRIS: There are good ways and awful ways to die.
ALEXANDRA: And I have determined chat me in chis house is in the "good" category.
CHRIS: Surrounded by your books and your records
ALEXANDRA: Exactly.
CHRIS: —and the empty spaces where your paintings used to hang. *(Alexandra hesitates ...)* Where are they, Mom? What happened to the paintings?
ALEXANDRA: You worried about that part of your inheritance too?
CHRIS: Answer the
ALEXANDRA: They're not worth nearly as much as the house, believe me. Give it a few years after I'm dead. Ten maybe. They'll be worth more. That's what, what was his name - I used to see him at all the arc shows and fairs -we both did the East Coast circuit- he did chose surreal dark things, chis army of pigs invading a bedroom. Or a man on a high-wire over an army of screaming vaginas. I always wondered who was hanging those in their homes?
CHRIS: We're not talking about
ALEXANDRA: He died- I remember because it struck me, he actually died when he hit a livestock truck and somehow he was crushed in chis avalanche of female pigs.
CHRIS: My God.

ALEXANDRA: But his scuff went for a lot more the next few years. His daughter sold it all off. You should cell Michael my work would be worth more if I did self-immolate.
CHRIS: Speaking of which, where is your artwork?
ALEXANDRA: What?
CHRIS: Your paintings.
ALEXANDRA: ...
CHRIS: Why'd you take them down?
ALEXANDRA: *(Waves it off)* I was tired of chem.
CHRIS: ... Seriously.
ALEXANDRA: Are *you* painting?
CHRIS: Me?
ALEXANDRA: You, Mr. Artist, Mr. Vision, you could always catch the human body, I'll give you chat. Your flesh was always breaching, moving, even when it was still. Jennifer used to cell me when you'd have an opening somewhere. She hasn't mentioned anything in years.
CHRIS: I'm still working.
ALEXANDRA: On what.
CHRIS: I'm experimenting.
ALEXANDRA: With what.
CHRIS: Sunflower seeds, if you really want to know.
ALEXANDRA: The mind reels.
CHRIS: I embed them in canvas. A light paste spray and different textures of glass, pieces of bark
ALEXANDRA: Sounds dangerously close co folk arc.
CHRIS: *(Gesturing to the blank walls.)* As opposed to the minimalist approach of your very latter period.
ALEXANDRA: My hands can't hold the brush. Okay? You see that? Six months ago, BOOM. Any small gripping-thing, like a, a pencil, my knuckles and wrist just scare aching. I can't do it. *(Beat.)*
CHRIS: I'm sorry.
ALEXANDRA: *(Beat. She runs her thumb over the lighter.)* But I can still work my father's Zippo. That's all that counts now.
CHRIS: It still works?
ALEXANDRA: Only one way to find out. *(She clicks the flint.)*
CHRIS: MOM!
ALEXANDRA: *(Smiles.)* I tested it this morning. Away from the jars. It works just beautifully. The flame is pure. Primal. It's like going back to where we came from. Like home. Very, very ...seductive ...

CHRIS: *(Trying to catch her eye.)* So if you're not painting, how *do* you spend your days?
ALEXANDRA: *(Staring at the lighter.)* I watch the news.
CHRIS: Okay, see, you wonder why you're depressed
ALEXANDRA: We should be depressed. *(Leans in close to him, quietly.)* The world is ending.
CHRIS: ...soon? *(Alexandra shrugs.)* What makes you say that?
ALEXANDRA: I don't know about out there. In here. My world. The Old People world. Every day another piece peels off and slides to the floor. Another friend dies. Another body part shrivels. A kid, or a, people on TV talk about things, made-up words and ideas like you should know them. It sounds like they're speaking English, but it's not your English; you think you're still living in your country, but it's not your country anymore. You're a foreigner. Your world is ending and every hour taps your back *(Tapping the lighter against the jar.)* Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap
CHRIS: *(Overlapping, gently.)* What about, hey. Hey hey hey hey, whoa. Whoa. *(She pauses.)* What about the nice things? What about your music, right? You've still got your records? *(She stares ...)* QXR? Do you still listen to the opera? *(She stares.)* Mom? Remember? You painting away in here to the opera on Saturday?
ALEXANDRA: ...
CHRIS: And we —you'd make all of us shut up, "Silencio" until the final applause. *(She almost smiles ...)* Our only break was we could talk during the Opera Quiz with Edward Downes at intermission — Oh my God. *(Alexandra smiles.)* That's why Dad started taking us out for those walkabouts on Saturdays, you know. To keep us out of your hair. That, and he hated Edward Downes for some reason —
ALEXANDRA: I took you out too, you know.
CHRIS: Absolutely
ALEXANDRA: Your father wasn't the only one.
CHRIS: I didn't
ALEXANDRA: I was the Museum Mom.
CHRIS: You were.
ALEXANDRA: Practically had to drag your sister and brother by the hair, promise them Rumplemeyer's after to get them to
CHRIS: I would have done it without the banana split.
ALEXANDRA: I know. *(Really looking at him.)* I know. We did, what, we did the Brooklyn Museum, we did the Whitney
CHRIS: We did the Met.

ALEXANDRA: The Met was a problem. Too open. You all turned the Equestrian Court into a gymnasium, running up and down
CHRIS: Even me?
ALEXANDRA: Especially you! Putting you in the Met was like putting your Uncle Sebastian on a nude beach in Rio de Janeiro.
CHRIS: That is ...such an image.
ALEXANDRA: But there was - chat one time. There was that one time -that one ...*(Fighting for it.)* - the, oh ...*(Gestures a spiral.)* Oh, dammit
CHRIS: I don't know what
ALEXANDRA: I see it.
CHRIS: The Met?
ALEXANDRA: - Proper nouns are the first thing to leave the body - I ran with you. Once. Do you remember?
CHRIS: ...no.
ALEXANDRA: The Guggenheim!
CHRIS: Ah.
ALEXANDRA: Tuesday morning, it was a Tuesday, nobody - We got all the way around two levels before a guard stopped us.
CHRIS: Yes! I do remember that!
ALEXANDRA: You should! That's how you should remember me- a young woman running past exhibits with her little boy, laughing, trying to name each artist as we went ...That's the me you need to remember ...*(Pause. She nods.)* The Guggenheim. That's most lifelike.
CHRIS: I'm sorry?
ALEXANDRA: No. That's not the right word. It's like life, it's not just in space. It's in time. When you're, when you're walking up the spiral, you're looking at the painting or the sculpture beside you. Fine. Maybe it's breathtaking, maybe it's crap. But then you look ahead and you can see the next artwork coming toward you, and beyond chat the next and next reaching up into your future. You get little glimpses of what's to come - "what is that?" And you start your relationship with it. Then as you move up and forward in time, it becomes clearer and clearer, until you see just what it is, right before your nose. And that's totally different than it was a few minutes ago. You see the textures, the brushstrokes, HOW it happened. And if you look back down, back into your past, at the artwork you were in front of minutes ago ...it's changed. You're above it. Beyond it, able to see it in its small place in the bigger

picture. And you keep going up and up, forward and forward until you can look back and see your whole journey in a new light.
CHRIS: And then you take the elevator down and buy a refrigerator magnet in the gift shop.
ALEXANDRA: Just like life. Yes.
CHRIS: Have you been lately?
ALEXANDRA: Where?
CHRIS: To a museum. Any of them. The Guggenheim.
ALEXANDRA: I don't ...my back and knees and I can't all agree on what constitutes a good afternoon anymore.
CHRIS: Would you like to go? With me? Now?
ALEXANDRA: I couldn't keep up with you anymore.
CHRIS: No running. I'll walk slow. If that's someplace you really want to go.
ALEXANDRA: It is.
CHRIS: *(Offers his hand.)* Then I'll take you. *(She watches him ...hesitates ...)*
ALEXANDRA: Nice try. You go ahead and go. I'll wait here. *(He watches her, not moving.)* Honestly, you made the trip, come all the way home, you should go. Really. It's got to be better than any of the museums they have out in, wherever you are, out west, Arizona.
CHRIS: New Mexico. I've been in New Mexico for two years.
ALEXANDRA: With what's-his-name?
CHRIS: Who?
ALEXANDRA: Your friend.
CHRIS: Steven?
ALEXANDRA: Maybe.
CHRIS: We broke up three years ago.
ALEXANDRA: Ah.
CHRIS: He didn't want to leave Oregon.
ALEXANDRA: And you did.
CHRIS: Yes.
ALEXANDRA: Of course you did.
CHRIS: No. No, no, no, no
ALEXANDRA: Your being gay wasn't a deal-breaker for your father, you know that.
CHRIS: We're not talking about
ALEXANDRA: It just made him uncomfortable. Like Gorgonzola cheese. *(Beat. Chris stares at her.)*
CHRIS: What?

ALEXANDRA: Your father was a big cheese fan. You must remember that.
CHRIS: ....
ALEXANDRA: "Milk's bid for immortality." That's what he used to say. But for some reason he disliked Gorgonzola. Except he'd forget that fact. So every five or six years, he'd order a salad or sandwich with Gorgonzola, just to try something new, and he'd taste it and his whole face would just - *(Makes a horrible face.)* And then he'd remember that he didn't like Gorgonzola. And he'd pledge that this time he was going to remember. And then he'd forget and order it again.
CHRIS: So my being gay was like distasteful cheese to him.
ALEXANDRA: I'd say so, yes.
CHRIS: ....I have no idea how to respond to that.
ALEXANDRA: He wasn't the one chased you out, that's my point.
CHRIS: I know.
ALEXANDRA: And you and I had that one fight, about you dropping out of art school -
CHRIS: One fight?
ALEXANDRA: I thought of it as an ongoing passionate discussion.
CHRIS: That was not the fight, it was just the last fight.
ALEXANDRA: My point is, you chased yourself out.
CHRIS: I was following in my mother's footsteps.
ALEXANDRA: What's that supposed to mean?
CHRIS: Oh, I don't know, let's think, little girl flees her family in Topeka to be a painter – hops on a plane chasing Pablo Enrico, the *chico* from Puerto Rico. — And that goes south, literally, figuratively, am I remembering this right? I believe he already had a girlfriend, but that didn't stop my mother the stalker —
ALEXANDRA: I wasn't Fleeing. - His name was Luis.
ALEXANDRA: They were never going to last.
CHRIS: And it all turns into a, what, a Doris Day-Rock Hudson movie directed by Alfred Hitchcock so whoops, it's off to Iowa – or somewhere, which led to San Diego, which led to Iceland, which led to meeting Dad.
ALEXANDRA: Ohio. - Meeting your father.
ALEXANDRA: So hooray for Puerto Rico.
CHRIS: So don't you dare talk to me about running. *(Beat.)*

ALEXANDRA: I still don't know why you never came back.
CHRIS: Actually, no! No no no! That's it! Don't you see?
ALEXANDRA: There is a question on the table
CHRIS: You were a single woman, right, popping all over the *world* in the nineteen-*fifties*, right. Everywhere was your home
ALEXANDRA: I was happy, yes, even when I was miserable.
CHRIS: It wasn't until Dad — he wanted the house
ALEXANDRA: The man lusted for a mortgage.
CHRIS: Exactly! But you — for almost half your life, who you were didn't depend on where you were
ALEXANDRA: I think you're missing my point.
CHRIS: That's a really recent development. This attachment to place
ALEXANDRA: *(Overlapping.)* No, don't do this.
CHRIS: Mom, this is your chance to shed all the old stuff
ALEXANDRA: *(Overlapping.)* This is what they tried in the bridge game, this is what Jennifer tried to do, trying to trick me, change the subject
CHRIS: Listen, just listen
ALEXANDRA: Don't change my point! You left us. And you keep leaving. It's the only thing you're good at. *(WHAM. Chris stops. He can only stare at her ...)* I'm sorry. I honestly am, I don't - It's your life. You need to be free to do what you need to do. *(Beat.)* Your time is the most precious thing you have, Chris. It's the only thing. And you shouldn't be spending it with some demented old lady. You should go. *(Pause. They watch each other ...)* If you go out the back door there's less furniture to move. I'll escort you. *(She starts to slowly navigate out of her chair. He watches her. She leans painfully on the arm of the chair.)* Ohh. Creeeak. *(Chris doesn't move to help her.)* I had a friend who said that's how you know you're getting old, when you start making sound effects for your body. I was supposed to take Dustin and Amber to the Cloisters - Michael's kids - have you ...? *(He watches her.)* I suppose not. They're sweet. They're the last ones in my immediate family I can trust, I think. We were supposed to go to the Cloisters, but my legs were just hurting too badly. I couldn't even make it to the subway. I keep making plans – you'd think id learn. It's not the news that's depressing, boy, it's failing and failing and failing and failing, more every day. *(Standing upright.)* I guess I haven't gotten myself educated enough to the present to realize I don't have a future anymore. *(Slight _smile.)* Which is why it's okay that I blow it all up.

CHRIS: I know what you mean.
ALEXANDRA: You don't. Pray you never do.
CHRIS: I know what you mean. There are a lot of mesas where I live. A lot of canyons. On my days off, sometimes in the middle of the night, I go out there. I drive off the pavement, then off the dirt roads, then 'til my truck stops, and then I walk. I go looking. I go searching for the deepest, most jagged, desolate, beautiful canyon I can find. And then I stand there. Some good ten or twenty feet back from the edge. Not because I'm afraid of falling. Because I want enough distance for a good running leap. *(She watches him.)* The chance for a moment, just a moment of finally, truly being free, no roots, no memory of the earth holding me fast. If only for a few seconds. Maybe then. Maybe then for once, what's going on outside can line up with what's going on inside. *(She nods.)*
ALEXANDRA: ...what keeps you from jumping? *(He hesitates ...He's got nothing. Pause.)* Over there. On the middle bookshelf. The Family of Man. Go get it. *(He hesitates.)* Go get it. *(He finds the book on the shelf)* Open it. *(He flips through - pulls out some postcards.)* I kept chem.
CHRIS: . .. chis was forever ago. *(He looks at her.)*
ALEXANDRA: The Grand Canyon, right? That seemed like a good job for you. Ranger.
CHRIS: I wasn't a ranger.
ALEXANDRA: You were leading tours.
CHRIS: It was a New Age backpacking company. I took rich families from L.A. down to do this shamanic ritual in the river, and then herded them back up, hoping we'd get to the lodge before anybody had heart attack.
ALEXANDRA: Was it beautiful?
CHRIS: It was. But the owner started treating us all like cogs, like machines, there was no respect
ALEXANDRA: Your, um - oh, your cousin, um, what was his name, I can see his face.
CHRIS: Dad had all those brothers and sisters, you're gonna have to narrow it down.
ALEXANDRA: He had chat mustache
CHRIS: Martin?
ALEXANDRA: No. Big guy
CHRIS: Francis.

ALEXANDRA: Not that big. *(Chris laughs.)* Francis just had that surgery, that stomach surgery
CHRIS: A tummy tuck?
ALEXANDRA: No
CHRIS: Liposuction?
ALEXANDRA: No, the inside-surgery, where they staple your stomach shut from the inside.
CHRIS: Right.
ALEXANDRA: His sister sent me a note.
CHRIS: Chloe?
ALEXANDRA: No, the other sister, the one with *(Taps her head.)* - the problems.
CHRIS: Samantha.
ALEXANDRA: Samantha. She's on some kind of new medication, it seems to help her.
CHRIS: Good.
ALEXANDRA: She had those three little boys, remember?
CHRIS: No.
ALEXANDRA: It was really hard on them. Especially the youngest one. He had that, not epilepsy, but the - shut down
CHRIS: Down's Syndrome?
ALEXANDRA: No, no, no, the not-connecting
CHRIS: Autism?
ALEXANDRA: The milder autism.
CHRIS: Asperger's Syndrome:
ALEXANDRA: Asperberger's, I think that's right. He had that, but he's in a special class now with other kids like him. He's doing well.
CHRIS: Good.
ALEXANDRA: Yes. *(Pause. They wait.)* Why did you bring that up?
CHRIS: What?
ALEXANDRA: Samantha's little boy.
CHRIS: I didn't.
ALEXANDRA: Then why were we talking about it?
CHRIS: I have no idea.
ALEXANDRA: Well, we must have been talking about something.
CHRIS: We were.
ALEXANDRA: Something that led to that little boy.
CHRIS: I have no idea.
ALEXANDRA: Well, trace your steps back!
CHRIS: I wasn't leading the discussion.

ALEXANDRA: Well, what was I saying?
CHRIS: I don't remember, Mom.
ALEXANDRA: Well, think!
CHRIS: I'm
ALEXANDRA: Think! *(He stares at her. She starts pacing.)* I was thinking about breakfast, about what I was going to have for breakfast
CHRIS: I was saying I know how you feel
ALEXANDRA: No. The desert.
CHRIS: The Grand Canyon. And my job and hiking
ALEXANDRA: Your cousin
CHRIS: Right! One thing about my cousin, the big one with the mustache
ALEXANDRA: Donald!
CHRIS: Donald!!
ALEXANDRA: Your cousin Donald.
CHRIS: Cousin Donald.
ALEXANDRA: He went out there for a long vacation once.
CHRIS: To the Grand Canyon?
ALEXANDRA: No, where you live now. Arizona.
CHRIS:...Arizona. Right.
ALEXANDRA: Arizona. *(Beat.)*
CHRIS:...and?
ALEXANDRA: And he liked it very much. *(Beat. Chris pauses ...)*
CHRIS: And that's the whole story?
ALEXANDRA: He brought back pictures. We all looked at the pictures. *(Pause. Chris nods ...Okay ...)* Why are you here?
CHRIS:...do you not remember?
ALEXANDRA: No, why are you here now. After all this time.
CHRIS: I told you. Jennifer called me.
ALEXANDRA: She's never called you before?
CHRIS: She has. We talk every few months.
ALEXANDRA: Has she asked you to come back before?
CHRIS: Yes.
ALEXANDRA: So why now? *(His phone rings. He keeps watching his mother. It rings again. Chris grabs out his phone.)*
CHRIS: *(Into phone.)* Jen — Michael, no, let me talk to Jennifer. No, that was the deal, I talk to her, not to you — You're not — I will call you when — No, okay, you know what, you know what her new demand is, three packs of Marlboros and the best malt liquor you can find. You go get that. *(Slams phone shut.)*

ALEXANDRA: What?? *(Chris moves to the window - POUNDS on the window frame BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG.)* What are you - Stop! Stop it! *(Chris holds the phone defiantly up to the outside world ...and shuts it off He keeps staring out the window. Beat. She watches him, mind racing ...)* You know what. Don't leave yet. I was wrong. Let me give you some food, some lunch -

CHRIS: I'm not hungry.

ALEXANDRA: You should have a sandwich. You always get cross when you're hungry. I've got bread. And cheese and some sprouts, I think. Probably peanut butter.

CHRIS: This isn't the time

ALEXANDRA: I don't have any meat, I'm sorry

CHRIS: Mom. I'm not hungry.

ALEXANDRA: I haven't eaten meat since the Vietnam War.

CHRIS: I know.

ALEXANDRA: All the killing. There and ...everywhere. I wanted the killing to stop. And chat was my role in it. So I stopped.

CHRIS: But we kept eating our cheeseburgers and fish sticks because

CHRIS and **ALEXANDRA:** — "Everyone has to follow their own compass."

ALEXANDRA: *(Smiling at him sweetly.)* ...especially little old ladies. And their estranged sons. Sit down. Sic. Sic. You should have some treats.

CHRIS: *(Being pushed into a chair.)* Okay, I just have to tell you, you' re making me feel like I just stumbled into a weird little cottage in a forest in a Grimm's fairy tale. *(Alexandra fetches ajar of candy from a shelf, brings it to him.)*

ALEXANDRA: Maybe you have.

CHRIS: Usually only one parry gets out of those alive.

ALEXANDRA: *(Sitting in her own chair.)* Listen to me. You need to listen to me. This plan that Michael and Jennifer have, and maybe you have too

CHRIS: I have no plan.

ALEXANDRA: Don't lie to me, Christopher.

CHRIS: *(Unwraps a candy, chews it.)* I have some desperate — and probably futile — hopes and dreams. But I wouldn't call it a plan.

ALEXANDRA: Fine.

CHRIS: "Plan'' is way too organized for what's going on in my head.
ALEXANDRA: But Jennifer and Michael's plan, I think, in fairness, would. be reasonable, even prudent, caring- except that it's based on several false premises.
CHRIS: Such as.
ALEXANDRA: That I don't know what's good for me. That the reversal is now complete and I am the child and they are the parents.
CHRIS: But chat seems kind of like the natural order of things, don't you think? It's been going on for centuries.
ALEXANDRA: Absolutely. To other people. But it's not true in my case. And not in yours. You. You have fresh eyes. You haven't been here in years - and I'm thanking sweet God for that right now - because you can look around. Look at my house, at how I'm keeping things. I wash the dishes and the clothes, and I try to go for walks and I listen to music and I read. I'm rediscovering mystery novels. One of the few pleasures, I have to say, of growing old is chat I can re- read some of my favorite mysteries and still have no idea who's going to do it. But look around you. No stacks of newspapers or pets going unfed or filthy clothes piling up. I would posit chat I'm keeping a better house than most college students, and nobody is threatening to lock them away!
CHRIS: Except you do have jars of flammable liquids positioned at every entrance and exit.
ALEXANDRA: Thar. Thar's an extraordinary circumstance, that's not the everyday me. Thar's me under duress - duress brought on by well-meaning but misguided children. You know chem. You know me. You tell them if they let me get back to my life, stop threatening me with police raids, I'll get rid of the jars.
CHRIS: You want me to negotiate a peace treaty.
ALEXANDRA: Yes. A treaty. Yes. You want a reason to go on, you want to be the big hero
CHRIS: I do not
ALEXANDRA: No, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, of course not, I shouldn't have said that word, forgive me. But you can talk to them. You can use the words - the ones I can't explain, or what they don't hear, because I don't know, there's some kind of ...*(Gestures.)* cloud ...gray...smog, there's chis smog between us that I try to talk through but they can't hear me. But maybe you can. You can make them hear me, Michael.
CHRIS:...I'm Chris.

ALEXANDRA: What did I say?
CHRIS: You called me Michael.
ALEXANDRA: I meant Chris, I know you're Chris. *(Waves it off)* Names! I swear, in the afterlife, names must not mean anything because words just ...they're like the, empty pockets you know should be full ...but you feel around ...*(Moving in her chair.)* don't look at me like that, not like that. Please.
CHRIS: I'm just listening.
ALEXANDRA: You're listening to see if I'm crazy.
CHRIS: I'm just listening.
ALEXANDRA: Dammit! it's called getting old! I can live with it, it bugs me, but I can live with it. Michael and Jennifer - they're the ones can't live with it. And frankly it's none of their business. I'm not asking their help with this. It is my problem, I can deal with it. And honestly, the more they try to deal with it, the more it becomes my problem. Your brother, he has this astonishing talent for exacerbating. *(Chris grins.)* He does! You know he does!
CHRIS: I told Jen one time he should list on his resume: Market Management, Fund Allocation, and Exacerbation.
ALEXANDRA: Yes! Perfect! And then, and then he and Jennifer just start feeding off each other
CHRIS: I have seen the perpetual motion machine. Yes.
ALEXANDRA: You lived in it! We both did! It's a wonder nobody's been led off in handcuffs prior to now!
CHRIS: It is.
ALEXANDRA: It's their fault I got old, you know that.
CHRIS: I suspect they have that effect on a lot of people.
ALEXANDRA: Not that way. It was - I used to think old age would be this fine knowledgeable time - the sum of all the things I'd spent three-quarters of a century learning. And now I find out, eighty years too late, that old age is one big game of "Surprise." All the time. Every day. I go to bed in what I think is relatively good condition ...but you never know how you are until you get up. Surprise! Why are my feet hurting? How can sleeping make your feet hurt? I constantly come as a shock to myself. And it's not fair - I know people older than me - Lucy Panchero, her and her husband - they're 86 and 89 – they just went to Thailand and I can't get to the library! I got the crumbling cartilage in my knees from my father, the varicose veins from my mother, and the arthritis ...I guess that one my own body thought

up. Not a good combo. But part of me thinks, "Well, if pains can appear out of nowhere, maybe they'll disappear just as easy!

CHRIS and ALEXANDRA: — But they don't.

CHRIS: Or if they do, they come back. I'm right there with you.

ALEXANDRA: Oh, please, honey, you just bought your ticket on that rollercoaster. You're just leaving the platform. Wait 'til you have whole bodily functions just PPFFF.

CHRIS: I'm counting the days.

ALEXANDRA: But my point is, I was getting used to that. To the surprises. The first time I actually felt old - like this was it - was a few years ago, when I saw how Jennifer and Michael started looking at me. Or how they treated me. They never said anything, but for the first time since they grew up, I saw myself so clearly in their eyes ...and this time I was fragile. I needed help. I needed protection. I was an old lady. And the more they offered help, the older I became.

CHRIS: But we can't do nothing.

ALEXANDRA: *(Leaning close.)* Actually, yes. Yes, you can. That's what I'm asking.

CHRIS: Mom.

ALEXANDRA: I told them, and I will tell you - if you find me lying on the kitchen floor ...you let me lie there. I am ready to go and I want to go in my own house. I do not want to be put in a hospital. I do not want tubes and extraordinary measures, and I certainly don't want a living death that drags on and on for years. If you find me at the foot of the stairs some morning and I'm not dead already, put a blanket on me, tell me you love me, sit with me and tell me jokes if you want, even if I don't respond. But leave me there. Please.

CHRIS: I don't think I could do that.

ALEXANDRA: I think you, more than any of the rest of them, can. *(Beat.)*

CHRIS: Is that what you think of me?

ALEXANDRA: I think you understand the hunger to be free. *(Beat. He watches her.)* I have very simple needs and I am very capable of taking care of them myself. And what I can't, God will. What they're doing - your brother and sister - is getting between me and God. They need to stop. *(Holds up the lighter and jar.)* Or I will stop them. *(Long pause ...)*

CHRIS: You may not understand this, but there are some really primal instincts in children. And one of them is that if you think

your mother is lying on the ground in agony, unable to call for help ...you kind of want to do something about it.

ALEXANDRA: I understand that. Fight the instinct.

CHRIS: So if you fall or have a stroke or a heart attack

ALEXANDRA: God willing.

CHRIS: Mom.

ALEXANDRA: I'm going to go, Chris, and going in my sleep is my number-one choice, but if I can't pull that one off, I'll take the heart attack in a second. I understand it's painful - but so is getting in and out of bed - and this won't go on as long. It's been a good body, it's taken me places and let me see and hear and feel amazing things ...but it's breaking down by the day now. I can't get to the orchestra, or plays, or the library. I can barely get to the grocery. I'm done. And I want to die here. *(Gestures around the room.)* I want to be looking at this when I go. Maybe out the window at my tree. One more time. That tree's been in the world almost as long as you.

CHRIS: We did give it a workout.

ALEXANDRA: It liked it. It had to get strong for you. The occasional squirrel was all fun and games, but three groping children - and your brother was not a small-boned child. *(Chris grins.)* It had that one branch, just high enough for a kid to grab and hoist. It never pulled that branch out of reach, you and it shot up together. So welcoming. So welcoming ...That is something that concerns me, who's going to take care of my tree when I'm gone.

CHRIS: Technically, it's not your tree.

ALEXANDRA: It is mine. I took responsibility for it.

CHRIS: It's on the sidewalk, the city

ALEXANDRA: The city is the one wanted to chop it down! Back when they had that what-do-you-call-it.

CHRIS: The law.

ALEXANDRA: No, the sickness, the trees were sick.

CHRIS: Right.

ALEXANDRA: The ones down on the corner by, by ...the ...ohhh.

CHRIS: Down on the north end of the block?

ALEXANDRA: I don't know. *(Gestures.)* That way. The trees down that way, one of them got sick so one morning, 7:30 AM., I hear the BZZZ BZZZZZ like a ...an axe with a trigger ...a saw.

CHRIS: A chainsaw.

ALEXANDRA: They were chopping all the trees down!!

CHRIS: It was their job.
ALEXANDRA: It was NOT their job to cut down my tree. My tree wasn't sick. My tree was still healthy and strong and getting old, but doing just fine on its own thank you very much.
CHRIS: Okay
ALEXANDRA: So I charged outside, I'm in my nightgown, my slippers, SCREAMING at the man, "Don't you dare! What are you DOING?" I got his name and his truck number and I said, there hasn't been a public hearing on this! I want a public hearing.
CHRIS: And I guess you got one.
ALEXANDRA: I got seven! I spent the better part of a year getting those bureaucratic Paul Bunyan's to back off.
CHRIS: And they did.
ALEXANDRA: And they did. I saved every tree from 602 to the end of the block. You see all those scrawny little trees they put in to replace the ones they cut down? They're like a child's drawing of a tree. Lollipops. Not like my tree. It's got character. It's reaching and twisted and you can't see it now, most of the leaves are gone, but this year it did the most amazing flames.
CHRIS: Yeah?
ALEXANDRA: Most of it was still green, but there was this river of red and gold right down the middle, like a, a King Midas Skunk stripe, then these fireworks in different parts, different days, Just BOOM. BOOM. BOOM. *(Beat.)* ...that tree is what gets me out of bed a lot of mornings. I want to see what it's going to do next. And I think it wants to see me here in my window. We look out for each other.
CHRIS: I thought you didn't want anyone looking out for you.
ALEXANDRA: A tree knows how to mind its own business. And I know when I die it'll be alone. But that's God's will. That's the boss of both of us calling me out. Not me abandoning the tree while I've still got eyes and a heart. *(Very close to him.)* If you stay, Chris, we can make sure that doesn't happen.
CHRIS: I could never afford to live here.
ALEXANDRA: We could work something out. Maybe Michael-
CHRIS: I can't stay.
ALEXANDRA: Why not?
CHRIS: I just
ALEXANDRA: There's nothing, nobody waiting for you out there, you said so

CHRIS: And there's nobody here either. *(Beat.)*
ALEXANDRA: There could be. Have you tried?
CHRIS: I did. It was called my childhood. *(Beat. She pulls back.)*
ALEXANDRA: ...screw you. *(Moves.)* Screw the whole lot of you. Get out. Go ahead, go back to nothing, doing nothing, your canyon, maybe someday you'll get the guts to jump. *(He doesn't move.)*
CHRIS: You want to know why I came back? *(She pauses, not looking at him...)* I was on my lunch break last week. For lunch I always go to either Golden Dragon, Luchita's, or Quizno's -
ALEXANDRA: Where are you working?
CHRIS: At a shoe store in Farmington.
ALEXANDRA: Ah.
CHRIS: Please let me...
ALEXANDRA: I just wondered
CHRIS: I was walking. And I come to this intersection and I'm waiting for the light to change - there's pretty heavy traffic - and I notice a woman standing next to me, short blond hair, kind of hippie-looking, wearing this beautiful blue scarf, but so, whatever, I'm thinking about what I'm going to eat. And I see another woman, this one on a bicycle in the street, wearing a helmet, backpack, she's coming toward us, close to the curb, and I think, "Wow, she's moving really fast," and then I see this truck, this big delivery truck that's coming up on her left, and it's moving fast too, and it's passing her, and ...she loses control of the bike. I'm watching and the bike wobbles, like she's braking, and she's lost control, then maybe she has control ...then she and the bike fall toward the truck. She just goes down and the truck roars past. And the woman in the blue scarf next to me, she yells, she yells at the truck, "Stop! STOP!!" And the truck, I don't know if he heard her or felt an impact, but he rounds this corner and stops. And I look over and there's the bike woman in the road, but she looks okay, maybe she's okay, and the woman in the scarf charges into traffic, just races into the path of the other cars to get between them and the woman on the ground, and they stop, she's yelling at them to stop and they stop and people are getting out and I think maybe the truck driver's yelling something, and the scarf lady checks the woman on the road, is she okay, maybe she's okay, and I see the bike woman's helmet's shattered. And there's liquid on the pavement and her head isn't ...isn't right. I can hear her, she's still breathing, her body is heaving for breath but there's no place for the air to go, and someone's

calling for help, people on their cell phones calling for help, but no one's going to the hurt woman, and I know I should go to her, but I'm frozen. Watching blood pouring from where her nose was and the flaps of skin ripped from her arm ...and no one is moving ...except the scarf lady. She kneels beside the hurt woman. Holds her, she's totally calm, she's saying something to her, just holding her ...and she pulls off her scarf, this beautiful blue silk scarf, and she lays it over the woman's chest and shoulders, and she just kneels there, talking quietly to her, holding her ...and the bicycle woman died. I saw her die. And the police came and took statements and blocked off the road and ...the scarf woman just sat there with this complete stranger who at that second needed her ...and she was there. She did exactly the right thing at the right time without even thinking about it. She made sure this woman had someone with her, someone who loved her, someone to hold her when she died. And I just stood there. I just watched it. And I thought, "This was my chance." I was in the right place at the right time ...and I did nothing. *(Alexandra watches him ...)* That was eight days ago. And then I got the phone call from Jennifer about you. And I thought, well maybe I'm getting another chance - maybe a last chance - for once, just once in my life, to be where I ought to be when I ought to be, and do the right thing. Something no one else could do. Or would do. *(Beat.)* So I climbed your tree.

ALEXANDRA: And what's the right thing? *(Pause. He watches her ...)*

CHRIS: If you stay here, and something horrible does happen to you

ALEXANDRA: I'm going to say, "Thank you, God, let's go." If I have time I'll call you. Or Jennifer or Michael to say goodbye

CHRIS: Because maybe we could talk them into going for some kind of in-home care

ALEXANDRA: I don't need a nanny.

CHRIS: That's not what

ALEXANDRA: I like. Being. Alone. How can I say that so you all understand it? When I was traveling the world before I met your father, I was fundamentally alone and I was happy. The hardest thing about raising all of you was you were always there. I couldn't turn around without some child showing me something or asking me something or needing me to wipe something. *(Notices him looking at her.)* Which I loved, I loved all of you, don't think that, but when you all finally were in school all day, and I could go back

to my world, be home alone part of the day - it was like climbing out of a pit, fingers torn from the climb, blinking, blinded by what I used to take for granted - but Free at last, thank God Almighty, I was FREE at last!

CHRIS: You really should write Mother's Day cards.

ALEXANDRA: Even your father didn't get it. When he retired from teaching he'd putter around the house, drive me insane. I told him, "I married you for better or for worse, not for lunch." Even those last ten years before he died, the only way we could stay together was for me to be alone. And since that time, I miss him, I think about him every day, but I'm alone again. Where I started. And I like it. I'm good at it. *(The phone on her bookshelf rings. Rings again. They look at each other. Chris looks at his watch. Answers the phone.)*

CHRIS: *(Into phone.)* Hello? Hey, Jen. I'm sure he is. Tell him he gets to practice waiting. Tell him we're really close, it's gonna be fine.

ALEXANDRA: Is it?

CHRIS: *(Into phone.)* You just keep breathing, and I will turn my phone back on, *(Fumbles his phone out, clicks it on.)* okay, and I will call you when Mom and I are ready to talk, is that good? Good, great, no, great, thanks, great, good, no, thanks, goodbye! *(Hangs up. Looks at Alexandra.)* We gotta think of something to get them to back off. Which means, one, you acting sane - *(He begins pacing, checking out the bombs, the barricade, etc.)*

ALEXANDRA: I am not going to end up in some nursing home. I am NOT.

CHRIS: That one's pretty clear

ALEXANDRA: I have to call Rose this afternoon. I call her every day at her nursing home up in Connecticut, just to keep her sane.

CHRIS: Okay.

ALEXANDRA: Although she actually claims to like living there.

CHRIS: Different strokes.

ALEXANDRA: She did. She had two different stokes. *(Chris laughs.)* I'm not joking.

CHRIS: I didn't think you were.

ALEXANDRA: I want to see my grandchildren again. Once a week would be nice.

CHRIS: That could be kind of difficult after this. But after a while, maybe if you meet them on neutral ground.

ALEXANDRA: They like Prospect Park. We could meet at the zoo. They're both so fast. You'd like them. They think fast and they move fast and I just ...It's all I can do sometimes to keep out of the way.
CHRIS: I know how you feel.
ALEXANDRA: You have no idea. An elephant would have an idea. A fish, big fish, a whale - would have an idea. A redwood, that's what I feel like sometimes. Like the world's in one of those speeded-up movies and I'm just stuck watching it roar by. Except I'm not as sturdy as a redwood.
CHRIS: And hopefully you don't have a nest of squirrels and woodpeckers living in your hair.
ALEXANDRA: My hygiene's fine, if that's what you're worried about.
CHRIS: It was a joke.
ALEXANDRA: Hot shower's all that can get me warm some days. There was an old librarian, this was back in Iceland, when I would leave the library, she'd always say, "Be warm." And I never understood what she meant. But now I'm her age ...I get her.
CHRIS: It's gonna get very warm in here unless we come up with a plan
ALEXANDRA: Absolutely.
CHRIS: So your, what do they call it, your end goal, your final bargaining position is you want to be left alone to die in this house
ALEXANDRA: Will that upset the real estate agents?
CHRIS: Excuse me?
ALEXANDRA: That's my one concern about me dying here. Will it make it hard to sell the house? People don't like to buy a house people have died in. Except your father. Do you remember that awful thing over in Brooklyn Heights?
CHRIS: No.
ALEXANDRA: Horrible. Horrible. Man went crazy and went to his ex-wife's house and killed her. Killed her boyfriend, their child, their cats
CHRIS: Mom, I don't think we have time
ALEXANDRA: Then shot himself, It was just awful. Everyone was just in shock. Except your father. When he heard about it, he said, "We've got to buy that house! That house is going to be a steal now!"
CHRIS: My God.
ALEXANDRA: Yes.
CHRIS: He was a visionary.
ALEXANDRA: He was insane. I always liked him dreaming big,

but that was when I knew the man had a serious screw loose. But that's my concern about dying in the house, even if it's peaceful.
CHRIS: Mom. I know real estate people. Buyers ask, "How are the schools?" "How close is the grocery?" "What about crime?" They don't ask if someone died peacefully in here.
ALEXANDRA: Do you think they ask, "Did anyone butcher their ex-wife, children, and some cats in this house?"
CHRIS: No.
ALEXANDRA: Then maybe I should have listened to your father about that one ...
CHRIS: No. No, you really shouldn't have listened to him on that one.
ALEXANDRA: Stop. Stop moving a moment. *(He does. She touches his face gently.)* This. This is what I wanted.
CHRIS: ...
ALEXANDRA: Two grown-ups ...in this house talking-just ...finally talking. Someone who doesn't think in straight lines.
CHRIS: The gift got passed down. That's why I didn't come back, you know. I was afraid you wouldn't like who I turned into. Or didn't turn into.
ALEXANDRA: No. You're still the one I can talk to ...whoever you are. *(His phone rings. Rings again. He answers.)*
CHRIS: Hey, Je - Michael, Jesus, what part of "Talk to Jennifer" do you -She's not coming out until - I think I do -We're the ones who -You have no - Wait wait wait, what are you -Pow - *(To Alexandra.)* Do him and Jen have Power of Attorney?
ALEXANDRA: No!
CHRIS: *(Into phone.)* Okay, bullshit, Michael, you - *(Long pause. He listens ...and listens ...Whispered to Alexandra.)* Are you sure?
ALEXANDRA: He's lying; he'll say whatever it takes -
CHRIS: 'Cause we can't - *(Into phone.)* What, Jesus, no, Michael, no, don't you call the -I don't care, you can't call the cops, you call the cops we are done -
ALEXANDRA: *(Overlapping.)* Don't let him call the police -Do not let him call the police. Don't.
CHRIS: You can't - don't - NO! You were supposed to let me finish! You're supposed to give me a shot -Mom and I were -No! You make that call and so help me - NO! *You* come to your fucking senses! We are armed, we are serious, you are NOT coming in here!
ALEXANDRA: *(Overlapping.)* They're not coming in here.

CHRIS: *(Overlapping, into phone.)* -Exactly, no, you *should* have known, you absolutely should've known, you want to play it this way we'll play it this way, you better get back, and you better call the goddamn fire department, 'cause we are fucking sending this whole block back to God! *(SLAMS off his phone.)*
ALEXANDRA: They're *not* coming in here *(Beat. Chris looks at his mother.)*
CHRIS: Do it.
ALEXANDRA:
CHRIS: I'm serious, we're screwed, Mom, he's calling the cops. He's not listening, they'll break trust with me, they'll break trust with you, dammit! Screw him, light it. *(She's frozen. His phone starts ringing.)* Mom. Listen to me. You were right, I was wrong. They are going to come in here and they are going to take you away. Probably both of us. Godammit. *(His phone continues ringing. Her phone starts ringing ...)*
ALEXANDRA: Language
CHRIS: Yes. Yes, language. *(He wraps his hand around hers and the jar.)* Fuck them.
ALEXANDRA: *(Scared.)* ...I want to see my tree.
CHRIS: It's there. It's right there. Keep your eyes on the tree. Just keep your eyes on the tree
ALEXANDRA: And it'll keep its eyes on me.
CHRIS: It will.
ALEXANDRA: And you.
CHRIS: Me too, we're all here.
ALEXANDRA: *(Watching the tree.)* We got it together, didn't we? At the end?
CHRIS: We did. *(Beat. They watch each other ...His phone stops ringing. Her phone continues ringing ...Chris holds his mother ...)* Here's to freedom. *(She nods. Takes a breath ...)*
ALEXANDRA: ...I can't. I can't ...move the lighter. My fingers
CHRIS: You can do it.
ALEXANDRA: I literally can't, Chris. My fingers...
CHRIS: Do you want me to do it?
ALEXANDRA: I want
CHRIS: Mom
ALEXANDRA: No!
CHRIS: Mom

ALEXANDRA: I want you to be alive! I wanted us talking! You and me! As adults
CHRIS: Mom, they are not giving us a choice
ALEXANDRA: *(Overlapping.)* They. - They who.
CHRIS: Michael. Jennifer.
ALEXANDRA: I know that
CHRIS: So
ALEXANDRA: No!!
CHRIS: What?
ALEXANDRA: This is my house, I want this house.
CHRIS: Listen to me
ALEXANDRA: I need to hear the birds, okay,
sing outside the window.
I heard them this morning
CHRIS: You heard me this morning.
ALEXANDRA: No, you have to let
me talk – All of you
NO! *(Pulling away from Chris.)*
The – my – my. *(She's Shaking)*
CHRIS: *(Trying to hold her.)*
Mom, Mom! Please, look at me,
okay, it's me, Chris, it's okay,
it's okay, right? I'm sorry,
it's okay. *(His phone rings again,*
he answers.) Jennifer, have you
called the cops? Please don't call
them, okay, I'm sorry I did that,
I'll call you right back.
(He hangs up ...stares at her ...)
Mom.

CHRIS: It's fall.. birds are done.

CHRIS: There aren't ---
Mom.

ALEXANDRA: It's not the
police, it's me! You can ...
hold them back, the walls,
that's not what I want, It's
not what I want, you're not
hearing me, what I want.
What I want is *me*,
Christopher! The one
thing I can't keep is *me*.
I can't keep me!

ALEXANDRA: The - the, the - the Puerto Rico and Iceland and the gotten married and single and children - Me! *Me!* I made those choices! What the world is taking away from me, what time is taking away from me, what God is taking away from me ...is me! And that is one hell of a betrayal, Christopher. *(Beat.)* It ...It ...It, it --
CHRIS: Mom.
ALEXANDRA: *(Stops him.)* It is unfair! And it is unjust! And they are making me watch it happen. I have seen it happening. I looked around, I had a bag of groceries in a hand I wasn't sure even belonged to me, and I was standing on a street corner I had

never seen before in my life, and I had no goddamn idea why I was carrying that bag or which way to turn to go home?? I looked right, a wall, a slit, a - a canyon of buildings and people and cars - Left, a canyon of buildings and people and cars - Straight ahead, I turn around, I turn left, and there was nobody I could ask. A thousand people and my heart is pounding and everybody is trying to get past me, around me, through me, and I was lost. I was so lost, Chris. And I felt this scream, I felt this wave behind my mouth, tears and this rage and ...and this pounding, pushing, and there was no one there to help me. Not even me. Not even me. *(Gesturing to her walls.)* The pictures, the paintings you asked about. I looked at them, my own paintings in my own home and I'd remember something - It would itch, clawing on the back of my skull every time I saw them ...and then one time I looked at this one. *(Points to an empty space.)* It was a... there was... this...

CHRIS: It was a pregnant woman done all in blue oils.

ALEXANDRA: Yes! You remember it.

CHRIS: I do.

ALEXANDRA: ...I couldn't. I had no idea who had created it or why it was on my wall. And I got scared. I took it down, all of them down, all of them. I didn't want to feel that way ever again.

CHRIS: But they used to bring you so much pleasure.

ALEXANDRA: The whole world is a double-edged sword now ...I don't know how to do it.

CHRIS: What.

ALEXANDRA: Getting old. I never watched anyone. I got out. Never knew who my parents were when they died. I just ran. And I thought you, when you were little, still so small, I already saw you, I saw me in you, who I was - we got it. The hunger for art, for more, and I thought, this one I understand, this one I can get right, I know what this child needs and I can give it to you so you won't have to run away when you grow up. And I fed you and I shaped you and I opened you up like I wanted to be open... and I got my wish. You turned out just like me. And you left. Just like me.

CHRIS: That wasn't your fault. I didn't fit in here.

ALEXANDRA: How could you not fit in here? It's New York! Everyone fits in here somewhere!!

CHRIS: Not me.

ALEXANDRA: But I did everything I could...

CHRIS: It wasn't the outside, Mom. It was inside. My skin was

always one size too small here. *(She watches him ...)* I just had to go somewhere, anywhere... *(Beat.)*

ALEXANDRA: It's rich isn't it, I finally get to see you again, touch you again ...this is what you get? Some crazy old lady locked in her own house? Can you really blame Michael and Jennifer for trying to put me in some room where the world can keep moving while I sit and watch the last pieces of me slip through my fingers ...Do you have any idea what it's like to know the only thing you have left to offer is to stay out of the way?

CHRIS: There's lots of things you have to offer

ALEXANDRA: Chris. I asked for truth in this house. And the truth is, I'm not me anymore. Whoever "me" was. It doesn't matter if I stay in my house or some nursing home or on a bench in Prospect Park. I'm going to be less and less me. Isn't that true? *(Pause. they watch one another. He nods. She sits, looking weaker ...Closes her eyes.)* I just wish there were some grace and beauty in that. A little touch of grace. But I've blown that too. *(Chris sits on the arm of her chair beside her. Holds her. Moments pass ...)*

CHRIS: *(Quietly.)* I was invited to a Navajo ceremony out in the desert in New Mexico - a kid I know, Terry Yazzie, he's a draftsman, a genius with a pencil and straight-edge, I mean truly gifted ...but he still works in a Dairy Queen... and probably always will. But he invited me to a ceremony out near Shiprock. And I went. And these three old men in jeans and flannel shirts came out just before sunrise. The air was chilled and they were stiff and laughing under their breath. And they had these bags of colored sand - reds and blues and golds and greens and everything. Pure colors. Like they wanted to turn the spectrum into something they could hold between their fingers ...and they took a few grains ...and held them ...then dropped them to the hard earth at their feet. And then some more grains ...And some more ...And some more. Praying under their breath, almost chanting, by heart, as if they'd been doing this with the first sand God created and would be doing it when everything had turned to ash. And over hours - minutes and minutes and minutes, grain after grain after grain, they laid out a world on the packed ground - Heaven, Hell, Courage, Fear, the four seasons, the four winds, four ages ...all of it in balance, all of it *right*. One grain, after one grain, after one grain. It was the one perfect thing I ever saw in my life.

ALEXANDRA: *(Eyes closed.)* Mm.

CHRIS: And the sun traveled over the sky and into the hills behind us, and the stars spread from horizon to horizon, and there was a ceremony, dancing and eating and drinking and singing, and I didn't even have a clue and I didn't *want* to have a clue, I just wanted to watch that painting ...and be there with it. And when it was done, it all got quiet again, and the three old men came back with the chilled air, stiff from having worked all day, laughing under their breath ...and they took these homemade brooms of straw ...and they swept the whole world into the air, the whole painting, all of it. Back into the earth. And there was nothing. No trace it had ever existed. Just in our memories. And God's memory. And that was *right*. It was true and it was *right*. *(She nods, eyes closed.)* ...But I don't think I would have gotten that, I wouldn't have *seen* it ...if you hadn't spent your life showing me how to look. Taking me to all those museums and explaining and asking and just... watching your hands and eyes and lips as you worked on *your* art. You taught me how to watch the sand come together.
ALEXANDRA: *(Opening her eyes to see him.)* ...and spread apart? *(He nods. they watch each other ...)* There can still be beauty in the coming apart?
CHRIS: And art.
ALEXANDRA: Show me.
CHRIS: ... I don't...
ALEXANDRA: Show me the beauty. Jennifer and Michael can show me the real world, but you're the one can show me the beauty. *(He hesitates ...looks around ...then offers her his hand. She takes it. He gently helps her out of the chair ...and they walk to the window. He opens it wide. Quiet sounds of the street. He leads her hand out to the tree branch ...)* Mmm. *(Her fingers touch the branch. She smiles ...holding it ...)* I thought about naming it, but it didn't seem right. It's too...
CHRIS: Big?
ALEXANDRA: Juicy. Too alive. You know what.
CHRIS: What.
ALEXANDRA: I want to see it from outside. *(He watches her.)* ...will you come with me?
CHRIS: They're going to be out there.
ALEXANDRA: I know. *(Pause.)* ...get my coat please. *(Chris does.)* I want to see my tree and I want to see the Guggenheim.
CHRIS: ... for real?

ALEXANDRA: I'm dressed to do something, I should do something. *(Gesturing.)* Will you help me move the furniture. And the jars and ...everything. *(Chris moves the chairs, tables, all of it, away from the door.)*
CHRIS: Why did you dress up to be a hostage?
ALEXANDRA: If I was going up in flames, I wanted to at least look my best. I want beauty. Wherever I end up - whoever I end up - I want the ugliness mixed with the beauty. Well-mixed.
CHRIS: We can do that.
ALEXANDRA: I won't be able to race you this time.
CHRIS: I can think of nothing I would like more than a walk with you.
ALEXANDRA: Will you stay?
CHRIS: I was getting the itch to leave Farmington.
ALEXANDRA: What about coming east? *(The stuff is pushed to one side, the jars in a corner behind the couch, revealing the door for the first time.)*
CHRIS: That seems to be the direction I'm heading. *(He pulls the duct tape from around the seams of the door.)* You want to do the honors? *(She hesitates ...)*
ALEXANDRA: ... I'm a little afraid.
CHRIS: I'm here. *(Pause. Then she unlocks the locks, undoes the chain latch ...and opens the door. Nothing happens.)*
ALEXANDRA: Huh.
CHRIS: Are you ready?
ALEXANDRA: I'll need your help on the stairs.
CHRIS: I'm here. *(And they walk out, slowly. Alexandra glances back into her room ...and then pulls the door closed behind her. Blackout.)*

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

Mason jars and cloths
Lighter
Frying pan
Cell phone
Landline phone
Postcards
Cups
Jar of candy

SOUND EFFECTS

Berlioz's Requiem
Rustling *(offstage)*
Phone ringing
Outside street sounds